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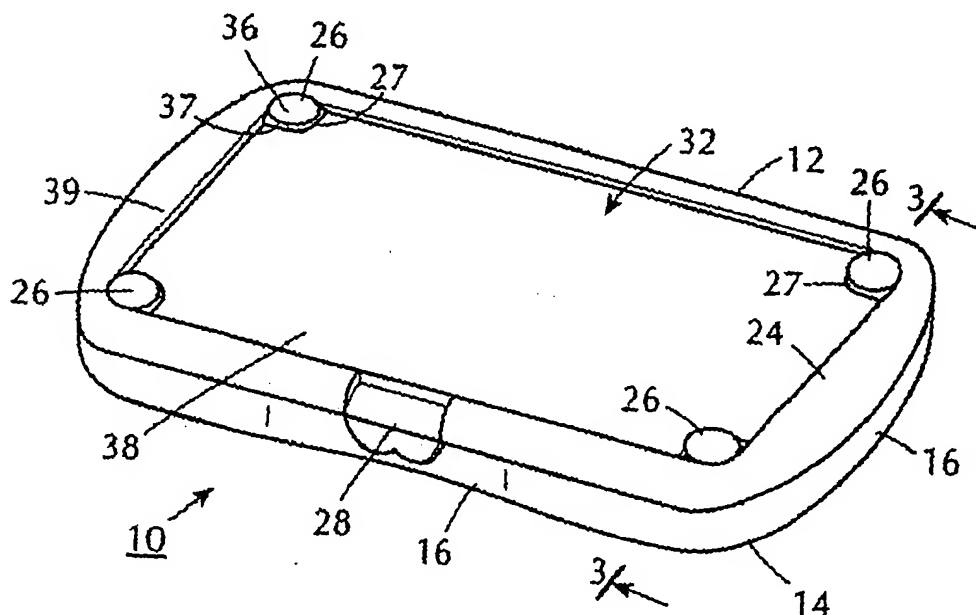
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(54) Title: CONTAINER WITH INTEGRAL CARD HOLDER



(57) Abstract: A sample container (10), having a lid (12) and a base (14), is configured to secure at least one card to an inner or out surface of the container. At least one of the lid and the base forms an inner volume (20, 25) for holding a sample item.

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## TITLE

## CONTAINER WITH INTEGRAL CARD HOLDER

## BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This application claims benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No.60/389,215, filed June 17, 2002.

Field of the Invention

[0002] The present invention relates to containers for relatively small objects. In particular, the invention is directed to a sample container for relatively small objects configured to secure one or more cards, such as business cards, onto an interior or exterior surface of the container.

Background of the Invention

[0003] Containers and dispensers for small objects, such as, e.g., candy gum, tablets, pills, mechanical attachments, and mechanical and electronic devices, are well known in the art. Often such containers are used to provide a sample of a product to a potential customer. In such situations, a company representative often provides one or more cards, such as business cards that provide information required for the recipient to contact the representative and product description cards or brochures describing the sample.

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[0004] Two problems arise in such situations. First, the representative must have both a supply of samples and a supply of cards to provide to potential customers. Often cards, particularly business cards, are kept in a card holder or dispenser, such as that disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 6,240,989 to Masoud, and discussed below. Therefore, in the exchange, the representative must hand the sample container to the potential customer, and retrieve a card from a card supply to provide to the potential customer. In some situations, this may be awkward.

[0005] Second, once the potential customer has received the sample and cards, it is highly desirable to keep the sample and cards together. This is especially important at events, such as trade shows, where potential customers receive numerous samples and cards and brochures. However, samples, which may be bulky, are typically placed into a sample bag, and the matching card or cards are placed into a pocket, a card holder, or simply dropped into the sample bag. As a result, cards and samples must be sorted and matched by the recipient after the event.

[0006] Various containers and dispensers for a small objects are known in the art. For example, U.S. Design Patent No. Des. 400,006 to Girvetz discloses a pager shaped pill box with a drawer, and U.S. Design Patent No. Des. 407,972 to Hilton discloses a sliding case.

[0007] U.S. Patent No. 3,741,430 to Bergh et al. discloses a container having base and lid sections, one of which has a wall member configured to be nested within the other section when the container is closed. A hinge is provided as a pivotal connection between the wall members of the lid and the base. The hinge defines a pivotal axis that is movable laterally relative to one section, while being fixed against lateral movement relative to the other section during opening and closing.

[0008] U.S. Patent No. 3,833,143 to Starkermann et al. discloses a slide container, comprising a substantially flat drawer-like shell having front, rear, and parallel sidewalls, and a cover formed plate member having at least one pair of depending sidewall overlapping the cover. The shell slides in and out of the cover in a telescoping manner.

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[0009] Card holders are also known. For example, U.S. Patent No. 6,240,989 to Masoud discloses a business card holder and dispenser sized to fit in a pocket. The holder comprises a lid and a base connected by a hinge. Business cards within the holder are accessible when the lid is opened. When the lid is closed, a projection-receptacle engaging mechanism located on the rim of the base engages the lid to secure the lid on the base. A finger access on the lid allows a user to open the lid with simple finger pressure to access cards within the holder.

[0010] U.S. Patent No. 5,572,815 and U.S. Design Patent No. Des. 343,638, both to Kovner, disclose a business card holder configured to removably hold business cards of different dimensions for mounting in a standard card storage and retrieval system, such as a ROLODEX®. The card holder comprises a thin, stiff, rectangular sheet with holes and slits extending from the holes to allow business cards of different sizes to be removably attached by inserting corners of the business cards into the holes. If the business card is larger than standard, its edges are slipped into the slits.

[0011] None of the references discussed herein overcome the problems discussed above. Therefore, a need exists for a sample container that allows providing a sample container and a card in one simple action, where the recipient need not be concerned with the possibility of separating the container and the card. The present invention provides such a sample container.

### SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0012] The present invention is directed to a sample container, comprising a lid and a base, each having an inner surface and an outer surface, and forming an inner volume. At least one of the surfaces is configured to secure one or more cards, such as business cards, product description cards, recipe cards, greeting cards, reference cards, index cards, and the like, to the surface. In a preferred embodiment, the container comprises a lid and a preferably hollow base. The preferred base comprises a plurality of sides and a bottom forming an inner volume, and the lid comprises an inner surface and an outer surface and one or more card securing members, such as, e.g., tabs, slots, grooves, or similar

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members, or an adhesive, preferably one that allows the card to be removed and reattached without damage, such as that used on Post-it® Brand products, double sided tape, or VELCRO® on the upper surface. However, either the lid or the base may define at least a portion of the inner volume of the container, and containers of the invention may comprise card securing members on any interior or exterior surface. In the preferred embodiment, each of the card securing members and the upper surface of the lid may form a slot configured to accept a portion of an edge or a corner of a card to secure the card to the upper surface of the lid. Any of the sides of the lid or base may be decorated. Decorations include those that are engraved, embossed, or molded into the surface, and may also comprise one or more prisms, diffraction gratings, white light holograms, or the like to provide a colored pattern on the surface. Containers in accordance with the invention may have any useful shape, and have any number of sides, ranging from four in a triangular pyramid to a theoretically infinite number of sides in a sphere.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 illustrates a closed container of the invention;

Fig. 2 illustrates an open container of the invention; and

Fig. 3 illustrates a cross-sectional view of the container of Figs. 1 and 2.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0013] The present invention is directed to a container that may be used to provide samples, where the samples are preferably small objects, such as candy, gum, collectibles, pills, tablets, mechanical connectors, electronic components, one or more ingredients required for a recipe, nuts, screws, washers, bolts, and electronic, electrical, or mechanical components and devices. The container comprises a lid and a base, where one of the lid and the base is configured to secure one or more cards on an inner or outer surface. As generally described and illustrated herein, the lid of the sample container of the invention is configured to secure a card to the outer surface of the lid. However, as will be recognized by those of ordinary skill in the art, depending on the overall size and shape of the

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sample container, it will be possible to secure a card to any inner or outer surface of the container. Where at least one side of the lid or base is sufficiently large, that side may be configured to secure a card. Thus, depending upon the application, it may be desirable to secure the card to an inner or outer surface of either the lid or the base.

[0014] Moreover, as generally described and illustrated herein, the container of the invention is configured to secure one or more business cards to a surface. However, as will be recognized by those skilled in the art, containers in accordance with the invention may be configured to secure a variety of different cards to a surface. For example, containers of the invention may be configured to secure business cards, greeting cards, product description cards, recipe cards, reference cards, index cards, and the like. Where the cards are recipe cards, the containers are preferably configured to contain ingredients required for the recipe.

[0015] A sample container in accordance with the invention is illustrated in perspective in Fig. 1 in a closed position and in Fig. 2 in an open position. Container 10 comprises a lid 12 and a base 14. As illustrated, the base 14 comprises a plurality of sides 16, and a bottom 18, where each side 16 has an upper edge 17. Together, the sides 16 and bottom 18 form an inner volume 20, such that the base has an inner surface 21 and an outer surface 22. The inner volume 20 of the base 14 is typically of a size sufficiently large to hold one or more samples of relatively small items, such as those listed above.

[0016] The lid 12 comprises an inner surface 23 and an outer surface 24. The lid 12 may be relatively flat or may be shaped to form an inner volume 25. The lid inner volume 25 may be combined with the base inner volume 20 to provide sufficient space within the container to enclose a sample item or items, or the entire space required may be provided by the base inner volume 20. The inner surfaces 21 and 23 of either or both of the lid 12 and base 14 may be textured, such as, e.g., with dimples and/or bumps that together or in combination have a shape that corresponds to that of the one or more sample items, to position the items within the container 10. In addition, partitions (not shown) may be provided to divide the one or both of inner volumes 20 and 25 into compartments.

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[0017] In addition, the container 10 may be configured in a form that is inverted from that shown in Figs. 1 and 2. That is, the inner surface 21 of the base 14 may be relatively flat, and configured to secure a sample item, such that, when the lid 12 forms a cover for a sample attached to the base 14. The lid 12 in such an embodiment opens in the manner of a ring box to reveal a sample item attached to the base 14.

[0018] As illustrated in Fig. 1, the lid 12 is configured to secure one or more cards on the outer surface 24 of the lid 12. The preferred embodiment of the invention comprises a plurality of card securing members 26 on a surface of the container, more preferably a surface of the lid, and, most preferably, the outer surface 24 of the lid 12 to secure an edge or corner of one or more cards to the container.

[0019] The card securing members 26 and the surface 24 may be of a single piece, or the members 26 may be affixed to the surface using an adhesive, a weld, or a threaded fastener. For example, the members 26 may be the heads of screws or bolts, or may be held in position by such fasteners.

[0020] The card securing members may also be in the form of a plurality of slots or grooves in the surface that secure one or more edges or corners of a card. Useful slots or grooves may be formed in a surface by any means known in the art, such as by molding a groove directly into a portion of a plastic container. For example, for a rectangular card, a pair of parallel grooves may be provided in a surface. One or more cards may be secured by inserting a corner of a card into each groove, and sliding the card into the grooves. Alternatively, one edge of the card may be inserted into a groove, and then, with minor bending, the opposite edge may be inserted into the opposite groove to secure the opposite edge. The slots or grooves may be parallel or perpendicular to the surface, or may be angled to better facilitate insertion of the card. In an alternate embodiment, a plurality of slots or grooves configured to accept a corner of a card, may be provided. A complementary pair of VELCRO® dots, an adhesive, preferably one that allows the card to be removed and reattached without damage, such as that used on Post-it®

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Brand products, or a double sided tape using a similar adhesive may also be used as card securing member to secure a card to a surface.

[0021] As illustrated in Fig. 1, the card securing members 26 are formed as a part of the outer surface 24 of the lid 12. As illustrated, the members 26 and the outer surface 24 define a slot 27 that is configured to accept the corner of a card. With minor bending, each corner of a card (not shown) may be inserted into one of the slots 27 under a member 26 to secure the card to the surface 24.

[0022] Preferably, as illustrated in Fig. 1, the outer surface 24 of the lid 12 is formed with a depression 32 having a shape and size that corresponds to that of the card. For example, for a business card, the depression preferably has dimensions slightly larger than a typical card, i.e., about 2.5 cm (about 1 inch) by about 8.9 cm (about 3.5 inches). However, as cards are not all rectangular, the present invention contemplates containers configured to secure any shaped card, and, thus, the depression may have any required shape.

[0023] Fig. 3 is a cross-sectional view of the container 10 of Figs. 1 and 2 through a pair of members 26 taken along line 3-3. As illustrated, container 10 is positioned such that the lid 12 is in its normal position at the top of the container 10. The depression 32 divides the outer surface 24 of the lid 12 into portions 38 and 39 inside and outside the depression 32, respectively, and, thus, the inner surface 23 of the lid 12 comprises portions 40 and 41 opposite portions 39 and 38, respectively. As illustrated, but not necessarily, the depression 32 is sufficiently deep that the portion 38 of the outer surface 24 within the depression 32 is lower than the portion 40 of the inner surface 23 opposite the portion 39 of the outer surface 24 outside the depression. That is, where the depression 32 is depressed on one surface, the opposite surface may protrude, i.e., is raised or elevated on the opposite surface. Therefore, where the depression 32 is on the inner surface of the lid 12 or base 14 the outer surface may have a raised portion corresponding to the depression. However, it will be recognized that a depression in one side of a surface does not necessarily require a corresponding protrusion of the opposite side, which may be flat, curved, or have any useful shape.

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[0024] As illustrated, the members 26 form a part of that portion 39 of the container 10 outside the depression 32. That is, as illustrated, the outer portion 36 of each member 26 is part of that portion 38 of the outer surface 24 outside the depression. Similarly, the inner portion 37 of each member 26 is a part of that portion 40 of the inner surface 25 that is opposite that portion 39 of the outer surface 24 outside depression 32. Where the container 12 is formed from a plastic material, the slots 27 and depression 32 can be formed directly during the molding process, which is preferably an injection molding process. Using injection molding, a portion of the lower part of the mold preferably contacts the upper part of the mold, thereby forming the slots 27. That portion 38 of the outer surface 24 within the depression 32 is preferably depressed sufficiently during the injection molding process for a portion of the slots 27 to be substantially even with the inner portion 38 of the depression 32.

[0025] The lid 12 and the base 14 may be connected by any means known in the art that allows access to the interior volume 20 of the base 14. For example, any surface, such as that of the lid, may comprise a flap or door that covers an opening into the interior of the container. In a further embodiment, the lid and base may be configured to allow the lid to slide onto the base to secure items within the base, and to at least partially slide off to allow access to the interior of the container. The lid may also be configured to allow a simple snap fit to the base. Where the lid is a sliding lid, one or more latches, as described below, may or may not be used to secure the lid to the base.

[0026] In one embodiment, as illustrated in Fig. 2, the lid 12 and base 14 are connected by one or more hinges 34. Hinges of any type known in the art may be used with the container of the invention. For example, hinges 34 may be pin type hinges or "living" hinges. Where a hinge is present between the lid 12 and base 14 on one side of the container, the container preferably comprises a latch 28 on the side opposite the hinge 34, where the lid 12 and base 14 comprise complementary portions 29 and 30 of the latch 28, respectively. Together the complementary portions 29 and 30 of the latch 28 secure the container 10 in a closed position, but allow the lid to be opened with finger pressure to provide

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access to a sample within the container. In an alternate embodiment, the hinges 34 may be replaced with a latch similar to latch 28. In this embodiment, releasing each of the latches allows the lid to be removed by lifting or sliding the lid from the base.

[0027] As discussed above, the size of the container will be determined by the size of the sample item that will be stored within the container and by the size of the card or cards secured to a surface. Therefore, for example, for a business card, at least one surface of the container, preferably the outer surface of the lid, has a size greater than about 2.5 cm (about 1 inch) by about 8.8 cm (about 3.5 inches). For relatively small items a container having dimensions of about 10 cm (about 4.25 inches) long by about 6.4 cm (about 2.5 inches) wide by about 1.3 cm (about 0.5 inch) high will be sufficient. However, larger dimensions will be required for larger sample items, and any of the dimensions may be greater than those provided above. For example, a spark plug will require a container having a height of at least about 2.5 cm (about 1 inch) and a length of at least about 10 cm (about 4 inches) to about 13 cm (about 5 inches). Containers of the invention having larger dimensions may be provided for other, larger objects.

[0028] The containers of this invention may be made of any material that may be used to form containers, e.g., wood, glass, plastic, metal, composite materials, combinations thereof, and the like. Preferably, the container will be a plastic container. Where the container is intended for use with edible materials, the container will be formed from a material approved for use with food or other edible materials. A portion of or all of the container may be transparent, translucent, or opaque, as desired. Most preferably, the container will be formed from a clear plastic, allowing the contents of the container to be visually apparent without opening the container.

[0029] This invention is not limited by the embodiments disclosed herein and it will be appreciated that numerous modifications and embodiments may be devised by those skilled in the art. Therefore, it is intended that the appended claims cover all such modifications and embodiments that fall within the true spirit and scope of the present invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A container for storing and dispensing small objects, the container comprising  
a lid and a hollow base;  
the base comprising a plurality of sides and a bottom forming an inner volume; and  
the lid comprising an inner surface and an outer surface and a plurality of card securing members, configured to secure one or more cards to a surface of the container.
2. The container of claim 1, wherein each of the card securing members and the outer surface of the lid forms a slot configured to accept a portion of an edge or a corner of a card to secure the card to the upper surface of the lid.
3. The container of claim 1, wherein the upper surface of the lid defines a depression, having a size corresponding to that of a card, and the card securing members are positioned to secure a card in the depression.
4. The container of claim 3, comprising four card securing members, each positioned to secure a corner of a card.
5. The container of claim 3, wherein the outer surface of the lid within the depression is positioned inside the inner surface of the lid outside the depression.
6. The container of claim 3, wherein each member is part of the lid outside the depression, and, with the outer surface of the lid within the depression, form a slot configured to secure a portion of a card.
7. The container of claim 1, wherein the members and the lid are a single piece.

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8. The container of claim 1, further comprising a hinge connecting the lid and base.

9. The container of claim 8, wherein the hinge is a living hinge.

10. The container of claim 8, wherein the hinge is a pin type hinge.

11. The container of claim 1, wherein the lid and the base comprise complimentary parts of at least one latch, configured to secure the container in a closed position, and to open the container with finger pressure.

12. The container of claim 1, wherein the lid and the base are configured to allow removal of the lid to provide access to the base inner volume.

13. The container of claim 1, wherein the base is configured to hold small objects selected from the group consisting of candy, collectibles, gum, one or more ingredients required for a recipe, pills, tablets, nuts, screws, washers, bolts, and mechanical, electric, and electronic components and devices.

14. The container of claim 1, wherein the container has a length of at least about 10.5 cm, a width of at least about 6.3 cm, and a height of at least about 1.2 cm.

15. A sample container, comprising a lid and a base, each having an inner surface and an outer surface, wherein at least one of the lid and the base defines an inner volume, an at least one inner or outer surface is configured to secure a card to the surface.

16. The container of claim 15, wherein the outer surface of the lid is configured to secure the card.

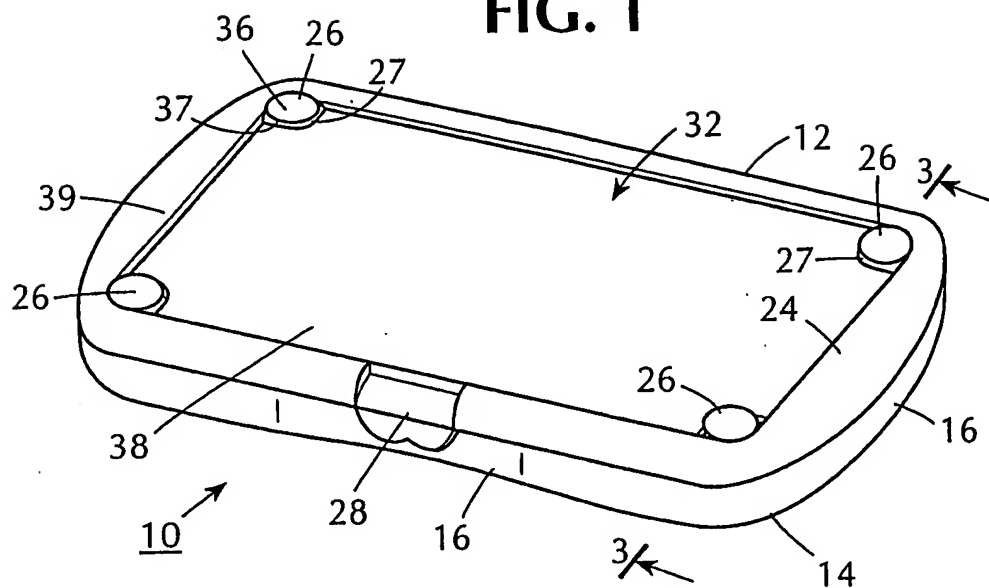
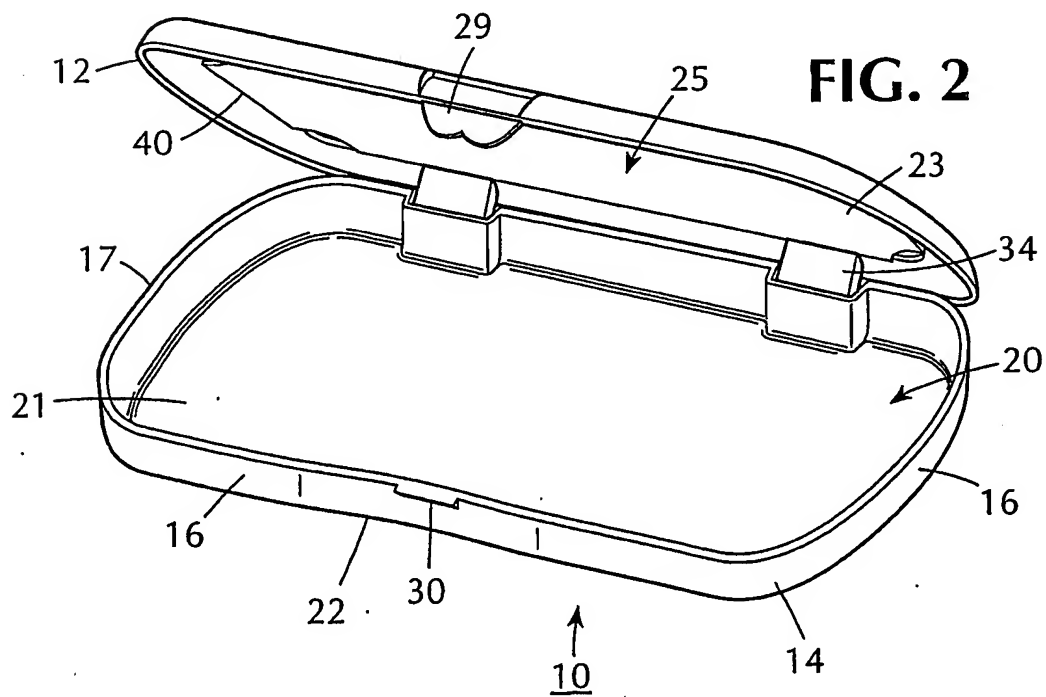
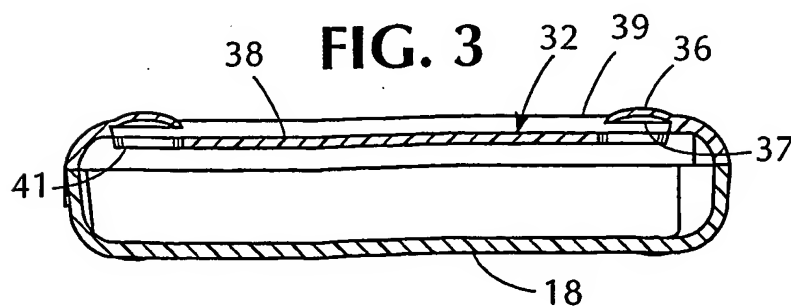
- 12 -

17. The container of claim 15, wherein the surface is configured to secure a business card to the surface.

18. The container of claim 15, wherein the base defines at least a portion of the inner volume, and the lid is configured to secure one or more cards to the container.

19. The container of claim 18, wherein the outer surface of the lid is configured to secure one or more cards to the container.

20. The container of claim 15, wherein at least one surface comprises a plurality of card securing members in the form of a slot configured to accept a portion of an edge or a corner of a card to secure the card to the surface.

**FIG. 1****FIG. 2****FIG. 3**

## A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC 7 B65D25/20 B65D51/24

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

## B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 7 B65D

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the International search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal

## C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	GB 1 212 598 A (MINNESOTA MINING) 18 November 1970 (1970-11-18) the whole document	1-20
X	FR 2 418 163 A (HERVAIS) 21 September 1979 (1979-09-21)  page 2, line 3 -page 3, line 15; figures 1-3	1,2,7, 12,13, 15-20
X	FR 1 229 191 A (CONFISERIE DU LAC) 5 September 1960 (1960-09-05)  the whole document	1,2,7, 12,13, 15,17, 18,20

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☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

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## C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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